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CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT
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COMMEMORATION OF THE HOLOCAUST

On April 10th Jews and non-Jews of good will, will join in observing Yom Hashoa--a day set aside to honor the memory of the six million Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis during the World War II era.

Though more than 40 years have past, the world has yet to grasp the significance or the scope of the Holocaust. The crimes of the Nazis cannot be fully depicted in any medium. No poet, novelist, historian, or filmmaker has been able to convey to the finite human mind the infinite suffering of the Holocaust victims and their survivors.

At least a million and a half Holocaust victims were children. The men who liberated the concentration camps were stunned. The most battle-hardened American soldiers wept in disbelief as they stared in horror at the mounds of corpses of every age.

It would be convenient for the world to blame the Holocaust on one monstrous person--Adolf Hitler--or on one fanatic political fringe group--the National Socialist Party. Evil as Hitler and the Nazis were, the blame is not theirs alone. Historical research clearly shows that the majority of Germans (certainly not all) were enthusiastic collaborators.

How comfortable the world would be if the blame for six million murders could be left at the doorstep of the Third Reich. Unfortunately, the accusing finger of history points far, far beyond the boundaries of Germany.

Millions of Frenchmen collaborated with the German puppet Vichy government.

Countless native inhabitants of traditionally anti-Semitic Eastern Europe behaved as badly as, or worse than, the Nazis. Fascist bands with grassroots support murdered and pillaged Jewish communities in Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Latvia, and the Ukraine.

And what about our own bastion of morality and rectitude, the United States? It is with shame and sorrow that we must admit the behavior of our country was far from exemplary during the period of the Holocaust. Both the American Jewish community and the American government did far less than they might have to reduce the scope of the slaughter. Distinguished historians, such as Arthur Morse and Walter Lacquer, have effectively indicted us for grievous "sins of omission."

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One would think a tragedy such as the Holocaust would alter our sensitivity for all time to come. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

In the years since World War II, we have seen genocidal campaigns in Uganda, Nigeria, and most recently, Cambodia.

Later this month, the important American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors will convene here in Washington. Survivors from all over the United States will ride an emotional roller coaster alternating between shared memories of triumphant survival and recollections expressed in tears because they are too painful for words.

The Survivors will not dwell exclusively on the past. The vast majority of Holocaust survivors saw in the creation of the State of Israel a miraculous resurrection of Jewish life. When they listen in the United Nations to the calumny directed at Israel from every corner of the world, they cannot help but wonder whether the "War Against the Jews" has in fact ended or is merely in a period of cease fire.

The presence of a large number of survivors in our nation's Capitol forces us to ask, "Who will be the next victim?" How many of them will survive? What kinds of suffering and humiliation will they experience? Above all, how will history judge the United States? We are the most powerful nation on earth, but have not always been imbued with the strong moral convictions tragic times demand.

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